

French police kill young man during Marseille riots

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The murder of 17-year-old Nahel by a French policeman in the Parisian suburb of Nanterre has provoked a huge wave of anger in France and around the world. Since then, the government of French President Emmanuel Macron has launched a brutal crackdown on protests against police violence.

When the WSWs speaks of class warfare to characterize the politics of Macron and the ruling classes, it does not exaggerate anything. During Macron's two terms, advanced war preparations by NATO to carve up Russia, and austerity policies have intensified the class antagonisms that underlie the extraordinary build-up of military and domestic police forces internationally.

The explosive situation in France and its overseas territories spread to Belgium and Switzerland. These events are watched with nervousness by the ruling classes in Europe and elsewhere, who also fear being confronted with mobilizations of the working class.

Macron gave unlimited powers to the police to suppress the "yellow vests" and, more recently, the struggle of workers against his pension reform. The French police injure, blind and kill. Nahel's murder by a policeman was fuelled by Macron's brutal policy of defending capitalist interests. The president has cultivated among the fascist cops the most reactionary sentiments to form a social base against the working class.

On the weekend of July 1, clashes between police and demonstrators were particularly violent in Marseille and throughout France. The Marseille police headquarters had considerably reinforced its security measures which, the day before, had proved ineffective against the rioters. CRS riot police units were stationed on Cours Belsunce and Cours Saint-Louis, in the city centre, to block access to its main shopping streets.

Two armored vehicles and two helicopters were also mobilized, as well as officers from the specialized units of RAID and GIGN.

Traders had also recruited teams of vigilantes to protect their premises, some of whom also carried non-lethal defensive weapons, Gomm-Cogne, which fire rubber bullets.

During clashes on the night of Saturday, July 1, a 27-year-old man died in Marseille. As the newspaper *Le Monde* indicates, prosecutors believe that it was probable that the death of the man, who was driving a scooter, was caused by a "violent shock to the chest caused by the firing of a flash ball projectile [a type of grenade used by French riot police] which caused cardiac arrest." The man was reportedly found on Cours Lieutaud, an avenue just a few hundred metres from the Old Port and the shopping streets of the city centre, where several dozen businesses were looted overnight from Saturday to Sunday.

It should be noted that it was not until July 4 that the press reported this information for the first time, in the local newspaper *La Marseillaise*, and that it was confirmed by the local television channel France 3 Provence-Alpes-French Riviera. As early as Sunday morning, however, the Marseille firefighters had mentioned to AFP the suspicious death of a young man who had "felt unwell" and had fallen from a scooter, without linking it to the riots that had taken place. Still, according to the firefighters, when they intervened with the victim there were no active clashes at Cours Lieutaud at that time.

Faced with the outburst of anger over Nahel's murder and the ensuing riots, the Macron government—already deeply discredited after its push through on pension reform despite overwhelming popular opposition—is in a deadly political crisis. Macron did not institute a state

of emergency, as was the case during the 2005 riots, but his police-state has launched a brutal crackdown on protesters and is carrying out rushed trials against young people in working class neighbourhoods.

The mass arrests over the weekend followed the police unions' fascist joint statement, issued on Friday, declaring "we are at war," and threatening to "incapacitate those whom we arrest." The joint statement continued: "In the face of these savage hordes, it is no longer enough to ask for calm, it must be imposed ... [it is time] to fight these vermin."

After this statement, heavily armed security forces besieged the main towns. Last weekend, 45,000 police officers were mobilised nationally and 7,000 others were sent as reinforcements to Paris each night. Since Nahel's death, 4,000 people have been arrested—the average age of which is 17—among them young people aged as young as 12 and 13.

Fearing new unrest, the annual demonstration held on July 8 in tribute to Adama Traoré, who died of asphyxiation by the police in 2016 without anyone being tried, was banned. Despite this, a peaceful demonstration called by Adama's sister on Place de la République in Paris, was brutally suppressed by the police and the controversial BRAV-M specialised protest unit. Adama's brother suffered injuries to the skull, eye, nose, stomach and back and was hospitalized. At least two journalists said they too were mistreated by police during the Paris march.

Advancing authoritarian measures, Macron envisages, as he outlined at the Elysée Palace in front of nearly 300 mayors, blocking the social networks used by the demonstrators to communicate: "We need to have a reflection on the use of these networks among the youngest, in families, at school, [and consider] the prohibitions that we must put in place. We could see it ... when things get carried away for a moment, we say to ourselves: we should perhaps put ourselves in a position to regulate [social media] or cut them."

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the construction of rank-and-file committees independent of pseudo-left parties and pro-Macron trade union bureaucracies. Only a mass mobilization of the French and European working class can defend workers and youth against police violence and bring down the hated Macron government.



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